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The Grand Hereafter.

A SERMON

PREACHED TO THE

CHURCH AT HARRISON SQUARE,

DORCHESTER DISTRICT, BOSTON, MASS.,

JUNE 10, 1877.

BY C. D. BRADLEE,

THE PASTOR.

CAMBRIDGE:

PRESS OF JOHN WILSON AND SON.

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S E R M O N.

“THOU SHALT KNOW HEREAFTER.”—JOHN xiii. 7.

SOME people wish to know all about every thing, right away; and some think that what *they* do not know is not worth knowing; and yet some others are willing to wait for full instruction, till God sees fit to reveal the hidden things that so long have been mysterious.

Probably a great deal of the unhappiness of life, a large amount of its undigested truth, of its fiction under the garb of reality, and many of the puzzles that so bewilder the head and confuse the heart, are caused by the unchastened desire to know every thing *right away*; for this longing leads either to settled despair, or to false invention,—and thus religion and morals become terribly confused. Let me not be understood here as opposed to visions, or to guesses, or to dreams; since all these must be often the preliminary steps to revelations and realities. But I simply wish to put emphasis on the fact that *nobody* can know immediately about the dealings of God with the children of men; and that a great many truths have to be concealed for a season, and sometimes for a long season, before they are permitted to burst with all their glory upon the weary and the seeking heart.

And this brings us to our second point, — that many think they know every thing, or that what they do not know can prove of no advantage to anybody.

There are some who presume to tell us all about God's thoughts, and ways, and dealings; all about the nature of Jesus, and the full intent of his word; all about the processes of the Holy Spirit, and the application of its influence; all about Heaven and its inhabitants, the human soul and its mysteries, and life on its good and its bad side; all about the Bible, what is true and what is not true of its contents, what is symbol and what is fact; — yes, all about every thing in heaven and under heaven, in the earth and under the earth, just as if these people had been with God from the foundation of the world, and were all the time his councillors and his secret agents! Ay, sometimes these persons speak either for or against God, and Jesus, in such a way as to make the blood run cold; for in their ranks are found all classes, — sceptics and believers, those who deny and those who affirm; and both parties often use an assurance and a familiarity which to my mind borders on the profane. I do not wish either an unbeliever or an enthusiast to use the name of God too lightly, or with too great freedom utter that word which should be so tenderly handled by us all — *Jesus* — or lightly toss upon the lips, either in derision or in adoration, words and truths which to me are so sacred, so real, and so important, that I would stand before them with a bowed head and the utmost awe. Then, too, I do not wish anybody to stand before me, be he an objector or be he a Christian, and say,

“I know all about those eternal realities, and I can tell you all things that are needed.” I should turn with equal dislike from Voltaire, or from the religious fanatic who tosses spiritual realities upon his lips as a child tosses his ball into the air. Let me be understood. I believe thoroughly in true revivals, in an awakening unto God and Christ, in the new life after the blessed pattern in the Mount; but I do *not* believe in false claims to all the secrets of Heaven. The great truths which are pressed upon our notice by the Methodist Church, — *free grace*, and *love*, — are the ones which appear to me the best calculated to lead us to righteousness; for here nothing is assured, but that which Heaven declares.

We come now to our third class of people, — and I wish to belong to that class, — who are willing to wait for full instruction, till God sees fit to reveal the hidden things so long mysterious.

I do not wish to know every thing; I do not claim to know every thing; nor do I ever expect to know every thing. I am willing *to wait*. I am willing to gain my instruction little by little; here a step, and there a step, through time and through eternity. “Thou shalt know hereafter,” is to me one of the grandest sentences in the New Testament; for it is a summons to patience, an invocation to faith, a call upon gratitude, and a grand encouragement to every soul. Neither do I see any mystery in this promise, any isolation of common sense, any shock to the judgment or the experience of any one. The law involved in it holds good in every thing else, and it is what we are accustomed to, day by day.

Suppose the little child should say, “I wish to

know all about history, and geology, and mathematics; I wish to understand the Latin and the Greek languages; I wish to be a Webster, or an Everett, or a Copernicus, or a Newton, or a Grotius, or as great as anybody ever was or ever will be," — why, we should say at once to the little one, "Thou shalt know hereafter;" and we should know that the child had a great deal to do and learn before its wishes could possibly be fulfilled. Every thing on this earth has to be gained by degrees; and by this rule the growth of mind, body, and soul is regulated, and nothing is done by jumps and starts, or by wrenching. The *desire* to know may be sudden; but the real *growth* in knowledge is a tremendous journey, which must be taken through all eternity.

Of course, there are some things which the infant must receive right away. By instinct he opens his mouth and eats, opens his eyes and sees, and distinguishes between friends and enemies; and by the sense of touch he finds out what will help and what will hurt him. Herein it seems to me that our religious education is illustrated. Some things we do know by instinct, and almost immediately; but there are others we can never know, whatever may be our claims. That God is our Father; that Jesus is our Redeemer, and died to save us; that Heaven is our real home, if we so wish it; that kindness, and self-sacrifice, and holiness, are pressing duties for each and for all, — these things may be known by every one *at once*. But when we are asked to tell every thing about the whole mystery of salvation, and all the items about Heaven, then we are puzzled, and beg to be excused until we get on the other side of the

river ; and even then it will be but little we shall know, for nobody can know God save God himself, and his Son Jesus Christ, who was and is his perfect image.

“Thou shalt know hereafter.” I sometimes think it is well for us to ask ourselves what we believe we shall know hereafter ; that is, what we really suppose may be the most comforting truths for God then to reveal. And let us speak with assurance, although we base our assertions only on the supposition of God’s eternal goodness ; for surely *that* is a good foundation.

We shall know ourselves ; that is, our identity will be preserved. Secondly, we shall know each other ; that is, Heaven will not destroy our friendships. Thirdly, we shall obtain a more glorious idea of God, and Jesus, and holiness.

I do not believe in any Heaven-life which cuts off the earth-life, which wipes out the personality that was revealed from the opening of the breath till the closing of it ; for such a new existence would be virtual annihilation. We shall know ourselves in God’s city as those who were once in God’s lower world, clothed awhile in garments of flesh. We shall know each other there, and earth-relationships will not be sundered. We may not indeed be exactly in the same position, close to each other ; yet I firmly believe that families will not be so scattered, but that they can visit, encourage, and bless each other in all conceivable ways. We shall also get better ideas of God, and of Jesus, and of holiness.

The great trouble with us now is that we do not understand God, even after all that Jesus has done to reveal him. We look upon him now more as a judge

than a Father, more as a king than a friend. We speak his name as if it meant anger rather than love ; and instead of running to him as the dearest of all, we run away from him, trembling and in despair. Not so, however, will it then be. For then God and Jesus will stand as dearer to us than father or mother, and as disposed to do for us every thing that we can honestly claim, and more than any thing that we now can dream. Punishment we may deserve and receive ; but oh, if we only relent, it will be so tempered with mercy and gentleness, that our hearts will be broken by the love that strikes to heal ! Holiness we shall then find means *wholeness* in all our powers, the full and rich development of every grace that God has given unto us ; and on whatever side of our natures we lack, our efforts on that very side will be redoubled, that we may advance the closer towards God.

“Thou shalt know hereafter.” This may apply also more directly to the sharp part of our earthly discipline. We often, under heavy blows, are disposed to question the wisdom, or justice, or love of the Almighty ; and yet, although we cannot understand why we are so treated, let us be sure that the time will come when the mystery will be explained, and when we shall thank God even that we were afflicted. Our part is to wait, and suffer, and weep, and yet not rebel ; and, by and by, the seals of the mysterious dealings will be broken, and the glory hidden in our stripes will then be made beautifully clear.

Miss Crosby has said, — and her words are full of cheer to troubled souls : —

“Dark is the night, and cold the wind is blowing,
 Nearer and nearer comes the breakers’ roar :
 Where shall I go, or whither fly for refuge ?
 Hide me, my Father, till the storm is o’er.

“Dark is the night, but cheering is the promise :
 He will go with me o’er the troubled wave ;
 Safe He will lead me through the pathless waters, —
 Jesus, the mighty one, and strong to save.

“Dark is the night, but lo ! the day is breaking ;
 Onward my bark, unfold thy every sail !
 Now at the helm I see my Father standing,
 Soon will my anchor drop within the vail.”

“Thou shalt know hereafter.” Dear parishioners, I give you these words as a chart for your future comfort, as a help in all the trials of life, as a peace when you are sick, and as a transcendent glory when you are about to pass away from human sight.

Eighty-five years ago a little child was taken away from a home where she was tenderly cherished, and where her heart was bound up so closely and beautifully that the sundering of the ties seemed to be the blasting of that young life which God had so abundantly blessed ; and the whole horizon of her experience looked dark and murky. Yet, could she have heard the angels chant, she would have caught these words, “Thou shalt know hereafter.” After seven years in the new home, the young girl was again transplanted, and brought to the house of an aged friend in this city : and thus was brought about the breaking again of ties that were deep, rich, and comforting, and which were fastened strongly and splendidly to her soul ! Yet, even then, in her doubt, her anxiety, and her grief, and in her troubled gaze upon

a future that was so perplexing, she might have heard the angels chant, "Thou shalt know hereafter."

Yet again, after sixteen years, a change came ; and this time it was a marriage, that lasted for fifty years, and after that a widowhood of eight years, and then her ascent to God. And as I read her "journal" that was written previous to this marriage, I could see that this great change in life was viewed seriously and prayerfully, and with a heart that rested sweetly upon God. Even then she might have heard, — ay, even then she did hear, — the angels whisper, "Thou shalt know hereafter."

And that child, and that young girl, and that young lady, and that married woman, and that aged one, was, and is, and ever will be, the Mother of the one who now speaks these words.

So shall we all "know hereafter" the reason of this and that, and what part we were ordained to play in "Life's great and splendid drama."

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